AN OBSERVATION OF *POLYURA SEMPRONIUS* (FABRICIUS) (LEPIDOPTERA: NYMPHALIDAE) FEEDING ON BANDICOOT DROPPINGS IN SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND

T.J. SHAKESPEARE, Z.J. SHAKESPEARE and T.P. SHAKESPEARE

52 Serene Close, Mons, Qld 4556

Abstract

A specimen of *Polyura sempronius* (Fabricius, 1793) is recorded feeding on the droppings of a long-nosed bandicoot, *Perameles nasuta* Geoffrey, 1804.

Discussion

Braby (2000) noted the occurrence of coprophagy in species of the nymphalid subfamily Charaxinae and this behaviour is well known overseas, particularly in Africa, where lion, leopard and otter droppings are widely used. However, apart from a report of *Polyura sempronius* (Fabricius, 1793) attracted to 'animal refuse' (Burns and Rotherham 1969), there appears to be no published documentation of coprophagy in Australian species.

Fig. 1. *Polyura sempronius* feeding on bandicoot dung.

At 1015h on 21 March 2013, we observed a specimen of *Polyura sempronius* (Fig. 1) that had alighted on the droppings of a long-nosed bandicoot, *Perameles nasuta* Geoffrey, 1804 (Mammalia: Peramelidae), on the lawn of a residence in Mons, Queensland. It is estimated that the droppings were between 6 and 12 hours old and the butterfly was observed on the same dropping for 35 minutes, reinserting its proboscis every few minutes. The

proboscis tested the surface of the dropping by tapping and probing it for 1-8 seconds, before moving 1-5 millimetres and testing a different part of the surface. This continued until a satisfactory part of the surface was identified (perhaps a sufficiently soft or moist area), at which point the proboscis was inserted into the dropping. Liquid was seen to be ingested via the proboscis. Occasionally, the butterfly readjusted its position by walking slowly to another part of the dropping and recommencing its exploration of the surface.

It has been previously noted that, when *P. sempronius* has been found at sap, rotting fruit and animal refuse, it is easy to approach and capture (Burns and Rotherham 1969). During the 35 minute period of observation, the present specimen was not disturbed by the close proximity of a camera held within 5 cm of it, despite the flash being used on at least a dozen occasions. Touching the butterfly also did not appear to disturb it in any way. Once feeding was completed, it flew away and began hilltopping behaviour within a 20 metre radius of where it had been feeding.

References

BRABY, M.F. 2000. *Butterflies of Australia: their identification, biology and distribution.* CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood; xx + 976 pp.

BURNS, A. and ROTHERHAM, E.R. 1969. *Australian butterflies in colour.* A.H and A.W. Reed, Sydney; 112 pp.